

Closing the Cadastral Divide



The “cadastral divide”™ is a term used for describing the gap between countries that have efficient and effective land administration systems in place and those that do not. On a global scale, the distribution is currently about 30% who do and 70% who do not. Attempts have been made over many decades to establish cadastral systems in less-developed countries, but with little success. Constraints relate to a range of legal, institutional and political issues “ but also to the fact that implementation of traditional Western-style cadastral systems is simply too costly, too time-consuming and too capacity-demanding. It is estimated that, with current rates and methods, it will take many decades and probably even centuries to get anywhere near full, global coverage.

(by Stig Enemark, honorary president, FIG)

Over recent years, however, a new ‘fit-for-purpose’ approach has emerged in response to closing the cadastral divide. The building of land administration systems in less-developed countries is now seen merely as a staged process, initially focusing on meeting the core purposes such as providing security of tenure for all and enabling control of all land use and natural resources. This can be achieved using aerial/satellite imageries and local participatory adjudication, while demarcation and accurate surveys of boundaries should be seen merely as an upgrading activity that can be undertaken at a later stage in response to social and legal needs and emerging economic resources.

To support this simple spatial framework there is a need to build a legal framework that will allow for implementing the concept of ‘continuum of land rights’ as developed by the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) and approved by the UN. Furthermore, an institutional framework needs to be established for applying good governance and easy access to land information for all. This whole process needs to be embedded in a capacity-development strategy that is established up front to ensure ongoing maintenance and service deliveries over time. This approach was launched last year in a joint FIG/WB declaration (FIG Publication No. 60) and will be outlined in more detail in a guide that GLTN is currently preparing.

However, this change in approach will not be easy. As well as developing the capacity at country level, a key demand relates to establishing the budgetary base, e.g. through development aid from donors such as the World Bank. And, most importantly, there is a fundamental requirement for strong political will and leadership at national level. The good news is that recent experiences show it is possible – Rwanda, for example, has taken the lead and covered the whole country using a fit-for-purpose approach within 5 years and at a cost of less than USD10 per parcel.

The fit-for-purpose approach is flexible, participatory and inclusive. It is fundamentally a human rights approach in support of the new Post-2015 Global Agenda which will come into force before the end of this year. Closing the cadastral divide is now within reach – let’s work together to achieve this in our time.